
A message from the Cowley County Public Health Officer.

The population of Cowley County has dealt with the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic for more than 13 months. During this time several restrictions have been placed upon behaviors including the wearing of masks and the reduction in sizes of crowds and attendance capacities at local events.

National media reporting and political rhetoric have made the response to the pandemic extremely complicated. Combining politics and public health has always resulted in the deterioration of trust in public health preventative measures which in turn results in poor health outcomes. After more than a year many people continue to doubt that the severity of the pandemic. Sadly, in Cowley County we have significant evidence in the form of 108 fatalities connected to viral contagion and over 3800 individual cases of the illness that contradict that narrative.

In Cowley County we have never sought to impose health protection orders that restrict personal activities unless a person was verified as ill or exposed and in need of quarantine to prevent disease spread. It has always been hoped that through common sense communication and the sharing of good information that residents of the community would understand the reasons why they should take steps to protect their health and the health of others. It has been shown that in Cowley County most people will make wise choices and that they will honor limits established by business or other organizations designed to protect community health.

Recently public health monitoring has shown that the viral transmission rate in the county has regressed significantly. For the first time since May 2020 we have seen the positivity rate for new cases drop below 5% for a sustained period. Throughout March 2021 we witnessed the number of new cases decline to a total of 52 for the month, That stands as a stark contrast to the time just 5 months prior where we witnessed new cases being diagnosed at a rate of 50 or more per day.

The regression in illness rate is attributed to several variables including; the continued practice of staying home when ill, the limited number of public gatherings, the practice of wearing masks in public places, the observance of social distancing and enhanced personal hygiene habits, and perhaps most importantly the growing number of people in our community who have made the effort to be vaccinated against the virus.

Our efforts to eliminate the spread of the virus are ongoing. We continue to provide testing to detect the presence of the virus in our population, and we have reached a point where we have adequate vaccine available from multiple sources locally that will allow everyone the opportunity to be vaccinated.

Within the next few days current restrictions on mass gatherings and the wearing of masks in public will be reduced or canceled and new guidance will be released.

The current news locally is improving, but the pandemic sadly is not over yet. We still have far to go. This is not news meant to cause fear or control behavior. It is currently estimated through vaccination records that less than 50% of the local Cowley County population that is eligible to be vaccinated against SARS-CoV2 has been vaccinated. That rate is too low. To effectively stop the circulation of a virus a population must have reached a level of immunity greater than 85%. We need to reach that goal in our county to achieve the “community immunity.”

Please understand that this is fact and not conjecture. We know how communicable viral diseases like measles, mumps, whooping cough, and diphtheria, to name just a few have literally been eliminated from society. It’s not that the diseases have ceased to exist, it is that our immunity to those illnesses has rendered them rarities and no longer commonplace. How did that occur? Through the effective use of vaccines throughout our lifetimes. Over the years, new break through medical miracles have appeared to fight illness and diseases; penicillin, antibiotics, pain relieving medications of all types. These are items that were once brand new, unknown, and scary but that we now consume daily to make our lives better.

We hear arguments daily from people afraid to be vaccinated. Fear of new medical technology, fear that the vaccine is a ploy to control individuals, fear of needles, bad personal experiences in life, or simply fear of side effects brought on by lack of medical information. Some people say that they want to “wait and see” if the vaccines are safe, well your time is now. Millions of people have already been vaccinated in the United States, thousands have been vaccinated in Cowley County it’s your turn - GET VACCINATED!!!!

If you need more to consider understand that the current vaccines that are available are the result of 21st Century medical science. Just like there have been advancements in other areas of life over the past decades, medicine and pharmacology have changed too. For example, 30 years ago, no one knew what a “smartphone” was – today we carry them with us endlessly.

In 2002 SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) first appeared on the planet. It took 19 years for mankind to manipulate this virus and give us the mess that we have today. SARS-CoV2 is a virus like measles, mumps, and all the rest of the viruses that have come before it and just like those viruses it will NEVER be gone – EVER! It will hang on looking for someone with no immunity to infect. So, what can, and must we do? Live life of course but be mindful that if you contract this disease that it likely will ravage you if you are strong, and it may claim you as a victim if you are weaker. The true choice you need to make is this, do you want to increase your odds of surviving a run in with the virus? If you do – PLEASE GET VACCINATED. It’s a great deal more than we were able to advise you to do 6 months ago – and I know personally how much we all love wearing masks and not going anywhere.

Stay well,

Thomas Langer, MPA
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